

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, CA
SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVES CAUCUS IN OTTAWA

1. SUMMARY: AUGUST 14 PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) CAUCUS GAVE PARTY'S CANDIDATES AND MP'S OPPORTUNITY TO RUB SHOULDERS, THOUGH PLANNED PURPOSE AS CAMPAIGN KICK-OFF WAS DIMINISHED BY CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY OVER ELECTION TIMING. WHILE SUBSTANTIVE SIGNIFICANCE OF PC'S DELIBERATIONS WAS LIMITED, REFERENCE TO "FAIRER TRADE BEFORE FREE TRADE" WAS HEARD DURING CONFERENCE, SUGGESTING IMPULSE TOWARD RELATIVELY PROTECTIONIST TRADE APPROACH WHICH WILL BEAR WATCHING. CAMPAIGN SWINGS BY JOE CLARK TO SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO AND ATLANTIC CANADA BRACKETTED CAUCUS. END SUMMARY.

2. SOME 200 PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) MP'S AND CANDIDATES FROM ACROSS CANADA ASSEMBLED AUGUST 13-14 IN OTTAWA FOR NATIONAL CAUCUS BILLED AS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY SESSION. MEETING BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, GROUP HEARD ASSESSMENTS BY SINCLAIR STEVENS ON ECONOMY, FLORA MCDONALD ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND JOHN WISE ON AGRICULTURE, AS WELL AS KICK-OFF AND CLOSING BY JOE
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CLARK. ACCORDING TO CAUCUS PARTICIPANT, ENTHUSIASM FOR CLARK WAS DEFTLY STIMULATED IN STIRRING "CALL TO COLORS" BY GEORGE HEES WHO URGED PC CANDIDATES TO RALLY ROUND JOE CLARK'S LEADERSHIP AND WARNED THAT THEY WOULD ACHIEVE NOTHING BY TRYING TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM NATIONAL STANDARD BEARER. CLARK'S CLOSING REMARKS REPORTEDLY CONCENTRATED ON NEED FOR NEW BUDGET WITH

"PURPOSE AND DIRECTION" WITHIN TWO MONTHS OF TAKING OFFICE AND ON COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING GOVERNMENT PROCESSES AND EFFICIENCY.

3. WE UNDERSTAND THAT PHRASE "FAIRER TRADE BEFORE FREE TRADE" CROPPED UP DURING CONFERENCE SESSIONS. PC, FOR PAST YEAR, HAS EXPERIMENTED WITH VARIOUS TRADE POLICY THEMES, INCLUDING SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. THIS MAY SIGNAL SWING TOWARD GENERALLY MORE PROTECTIONIST APPROACH AND BEARS WATCHING. ONE PC SPOKESMAN, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS CHARACTERIZED CANADIAN SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT CALLING FOR FREE TRADE WITH U.S. (OTTAWA 3967) AS "REAL ALICE IN WONDERLAND STUFF".

4. SOURCES IN PC NATIONAL OFFICE DOWNPLAYED POLICY SIGNIFICANCE OF CONCLAVE, DESCRIBING IT AS MOSTLY "PUFFERY." THEY SAID CAUCUS HAD BEEN INTENDED TO SERVE AS CAMPAIGN KICK-OFF ON BASIS OF EARLIER EXPECTATION THAT PRIME MINISTER WOULD BE ISSUING CALL FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS THIS WEEK. WHILE CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY OVER TIMING OF ELECTIONS THUS TOOK SOME OF PUNCH OUT OF PC CAUCUS, MEETING GAVE USEFUL OPPORTUNITY TO PARTY'S NEW CANDIDATES TO RUB SHOULDERS WITH VETERANS.

5. CAUCUS FOLLOWED FOUR-DAY SWING BY JOE CLARK THROUGH SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO WHICH PC OFFICIALS IN OTTAWA SAW AS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ENCOURAGING, BUT WHICH UNFORTUNATELY REFLECTED CLARK'S GIFT FOR BAD TIMING. PLAYING OPPOSITE COMMONWEALTH GAMES IN EDMONTON AND PREMIER'S CONFERENCE IN REGINA (OTTAWA 3985), :-)-4(S ENTOURAGE ATTRACTED ONLY TWO OR THREE NATIONAL REPORTERS AND SCANT MEDIA COVERAGE WHICH DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED PC WORKERS. CLARK IS FOLLOWING UP WITH TOUR OF ATLANTIC CANADA, WHICH SO FAR IS RECEIVING SOMEWHAT BETTER MEDIA PLAY. ENDERS

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